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ABSTRACT

Three approaches (other than behavioral) for the management of behavior problems in special education are described. Values clarification (attributed to S. G. Simon) is described as a preventative approach emphasizing the student's role in managing him- or herself. Proponents of this approach view many behavior problems as arising from the absence of clearly stated values. R. Dreikurs' approach posits that children misbehave because they possess mistaken social goals, including the need for excessive attention, power, revenge, or an expression of inadequacy. He asserts that teachers must systematically guide the basic group process while applying strategies appropriate to proper goal development in both crisis and preventive situations. The final approach, advocated by J. Dobson, emphasizes the teacher's role as an authoritarian in classroom discipline and is seen primarily as a crisis intervention strategy. (CL)

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Alternatives to Behavioral Classroom Management

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Alternatives to Behavioral Classroom Management

Many classroom teachers, especially in special education, are exposed primarily to one model of classroom management, the behavioral model. This model is powerful and broadly applicable to a variety of classroom concerns, from "on task" and work completion to social interaction and positive self-statements. Yet this model does not provide all the answers for all classroom problems. It is the opinion of this presenter that teachers should be exposed to other possible approaches to classroom management so they will have choice in their problem solving strategies.

Management strategies can be examined from a variety of frameworks or continua - one continuum examines the degree of emphasis on "on the spot," crisis management versus preventive, non-crisis strategy. "On the spot" strategies are those needed at times of turmoil, when the student or class is at his/her worst and immediate action is required of the teacher for instruction to proceed. All of us will face these crisis situations in our teaching careers, and will need an arsenal of strategies so we can act quickly to resolve these tense moments. Generally, strategies to reduce or redirect undesirable behaviors are needed at these times.

Preventive strategies are those methods to use during moments of calm or relative normality in the classroom, in hopes of avoiding future crises. Two subcategories can be delineated: relationship building and teaching aimed towards management concerns. Relationship building includes any positive personal interaction with students, any "fun time" between

teacher and pupil. A side benefit of a good relationship tends to be a smoother functioning classroom, where students desire to cooperate with their teacher. Teaching aimed toward management may be considered affective education; generally, group discussion and problem solving is involved although some direct instruction in expected behaviors may be provided. Preventative strategies may work best in terms of long term change, but don't provide the means for handling the immediate upset.

A second framework for viewing management strategy considers the degree of teacher intervention versus emphasis on self-responsibility of the child. Some approaches stress teacher-imposed management, even to the degree of physical imposition, if necessary. Other strategies stress the elicitation of self-management from students, with the teacher playing an indirect, facilitating role. Although age and "maturity" (whatever that is) of students, and personal characteristics of the teacher, may heavily determine the portion of this continuum from which the teacher generally operates, it may be to the advantage of the teacher to have knowledge of the full range of strategies available.

Perhaps these continua will become more meaningful if management models representing different positions on them are examined. Three such models will be examined, the approaches of Simon (values clarification), Dreikurs (mistaken social goals), and Dobson (teacher as authority).

Values clarification is a preventative approach with a strong emphasis on developing the inate ability of the child to manage his/her own functioning. Formal lessons are presented which allow students to actively explore their individual attitudes and values, as well as alternatives to them. In this approach, the teacher functions primarily as a guide and questioner and is not to impose his/her own values. Typically, the

teacher establishes a situation where students must select one value in preference to another. As lessons procede, students may be asked to support their choices, and ultimately to develop a plan for acting on them. (Simon doesn't consider something a value unless we are willing to act upon it.) Learning individual choices in each situation is less important than learning the values clarification process; that is, learning how to clarify what it is we hold as important.

An example of a values clarification activity is a rank ordering of personal characteristics. For example, the teacher may ask students to rank the following three qualities in terms of which they would most (to least) want to possess: intelligence, beauty, or power. After a variety of such choices, students will be asked to support their choices, revealing the beliefs behind the values and allowing exposure to alternate attitudes. Eventually students may be asked to indicate ways of persuing or developing the qualities they desire.

Simon does not present suggestions for crisis management, but suggests that in time, if values are clarified, classroom management problems will be minimized. He sees many behavior problems as arising from the absense of clearly established values.

Perhaps representing a more middle position on our continua is the approach of Dreikurs. Dreikurs' approach involves both crisis and preventive strategies. In a crisis situation, the first step would be to identify the mistaken goal of the child. Dreikurs identifies four possible mistaken goals: a need for excessive attention, power, revenge, or an expression of inadequacy. Strategies are then paired to the goal, and may involve ignoring, using humor, reacting in an unexpected manner, providing encouragement, or allowing the child to experience the natural or logical consequences of the behavior. Preventive strategies stress "winning" the

student (establishing a positive relationship with him/her) and extensive use of the social group, primarily through group discussion and decision making.

Dreikurs'group discussions are a prime example of his position on the teacher-intervention versus self-responsibility continuum. In these discussions, Dreikurs stresses a balance between teacher firmness and respect for the students. Teachers are to respect the ability of students to self-determine elements of the classroom management system, but the teacher still systematically guides, generally though directive questioning procedures, the basic group process. Once the teacher has adequately modeled this process several times, s/he can move to more of an adjunct position. Thus, the teacher exerts a major influence on the group, while still allowing for democratic determination of classroom rules and order.

The final approach to be examined today is Dobson's "dare to discipline" system. Dobson perhaps represents the extreme end of the continuum on teacher intervention versus self-responsibility of children; he believes that young children (under age 10) are not yet capable of acting responsibly in a consistent manner. Therefore, it is a necessity for the teacher to be a strong authority figure, establishing clear rules and disciplining children who do not follow them. If we adults are unwilling to take this responsibility, our children will never learn to function as disciplined, contributing members of society. A high degree of teacher direction and structure is needed if a classroom is to run smoothly.

Although Dobson provides direction for preventative discipline (eg. establish a relationship with each child and use the magical gift of "bribery," or positive reinforcement), he is perhaps best known for his suggestions for handling classroom crises, especially those involving

defiant children. Dobson recommends coming down hard on any child defying one's authority as a teacher. Confrontation should occur at the first suggestion of rebellion; the teacher, with a voice of calm authority, is to stress what the student is to do and is to be willing to quickly back that direction with physical action, if necessary. Supposedly minor offenses, such as ignoring the teacher's direction to sit down and work quietly, will escalate if the teacher does not immediately follow up on this expectation. Once the class learns that the teacher's word is law, and will be enforced, there will be less testing of "who is toughest" and the classroom can function peacefully.

To successfully manage any classroom, and perhaps especially a special education classroom, it may be necessary for a teacher to have a variety of strategies. Depending on the composition of the class and the teacher's personality, there will probably be a tendency to favor strategies from a given slice of the two continua presented. It may be easy to become complaisant with strategies that have had some degree of success. Yet, for teachers to continue to develop as professionals, it may be necessary to explore new strategies, at new points on the continua. Probably an ultimate stress towards self-management and preventive techniques is preferable, but initially some "backup" from teacher-imposed and crisis management strategy may be essential. Using strategies from the "wrong" point on a continuum may be as unworkable as giving a child fourth grade material who is operating at a second grade level (or vice versa). A key element of management strategy may be the match of the strategy to the individual situation.

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